



The Gift of Fellowship

Revolutionary Common Sense
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When *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* movie was released (the first in the trilogy), my husband and son wasted no time getting to the theater. Fifteen-year-old Benjamin was entranced by the battle scenes shown on the television ads. At the time, my seventeen-year-old daughter, Emily, and I weren't too interested in the movie. I had read and enjoyed the book in high school, but the TV ads made it look like a "guy-movie," so Emily and I stayed home.

Our two guys reported that it was, indeed, a fantastic movie, and Benj repeatedly said he wanted the family to see it together. Weeks passed, and the movie was no longer shown at the theater. So, when it came out on DVD, I rented it, we watched it together, and I promptly bought a copy. Emily and I couldn't get enough of it, and the whole family eagerly awaited *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, the second and third installments of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Author J.R.R. Tolkien's saga is great literature, and on-screen, the incredible sets and believable performances make the fantasy real.

Movies, like books, touch each person in a unique fashion. We each get something a little different from the experience. Benjamin, for example, loved the exciting adventures of Frodo, the ring-bearer; the scary characters; and the battle scenes, of course. Emily did not eagerly anticipate the fighting, but was enchanted by all the characters

and their dedication to completing their quest to rid the world of the evil ring.

But there's more. Each film in *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) trilogy has much to offer in how we think and feel about people who have dis-

abilities and/or differences. The setting of the movie—fictional "Middle-earth"—is populated by different "races:" Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Orcs. Wizards, Ringwraiths, and Trolls are important players in the story, too. (There may be others, and if you're an LOTR expert, forgive any errors in my description!)

The Hobbits are happy, fun-loving, friendly people who are very small and have very large hairy feet (and wear no shoes). Elves are tall, elegant, artistic, and immortal. Dwarves are brave,

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tough, and hardworking, and while they're short, they're taller (and wider) than Hobbits. Men are mortal and imperfect, confident and unsure, heroic and frightened. (And contrary to the names—especially “Men”—there *are* females in these different races, except for the Orcs.) The actual “Fellowship” is composed of individuals from each of these groups. On the “other side” are the monster-like Orcs who are led by masters of evil.

It was the composition and actions of the Fellowship that touched me the most, and which may have lessons for us all. During the weeks and months of the perilous journey to return the “one ring” to the fire from which it was forged, the Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and Men were dependent on one another. The abilities and characteristics unique to the people of these different races were needed to ensure success. Members of the Fellowship were very different from one another, and time after time, it was the *differences* among the individuals that were, in fact, strengths! None in the group thought himself superior to the others; none felt sorry for the others because of these differences; and none saw himself as “deficient” in any way, nor wanted to be like the others. What may have appeared as an inequality in size, strength, age, experience, or ability to wield a weapon *did not diminish a person's value*.

A sidebar is in order here. Working to help change language, attitudes, and perceptions is one of my life goals. To enjoy and learn from

the LOTR trilogy, however, one must not take offense by the name “Dwarves.” Tolkein’s “race of Dwarves” is unlike Disney’s animated “Seven Dwarfs” and other stereotypical perceptions of Little People (individuals of short stature). The leader of the Dwarves is a powerful and ferocious man who proves that size is irrelevant!

The Fellowship included people whose characteristics spanned the gamut: short/tall, playful/serious, timid/bold, novice/experienced, and more. Yet each person was equally valued, equally important. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

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If you haven't seen any of *The Lord of the Rings* movies yet, I hope you will soon. If you *have*

seen them, watch again. Whether it's your first, second, or third time to experience these beautiful and powerful movies, view them with disability issues in the back of your mind. Then ponder how to apply the lessons to your own situation.

Maybe just thinking of the word—fellowship—during our daily activities will influence our actions and lead us to take steps to ensure we're in fellowship with people with disabilities and differences. Simultaneously, being in fellowship will enable us to recognize the strengths, abilities, and gifts of others—characteristics which have always been present, but which may have been invisible to our unseeing eyes until now. The gift of fellowship is one we can all *give*; the gift of fellowship is also one we all *need*.